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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. KRENKEL (Austria)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 94: ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN (A/47/38; A/47/82-S/23512; A/47/88-S/23563; A/47/340, 368, 377, 391, 508 and 564)

1. The CHAIRMAN, after listing the documents before the Committee under agenda item 94, invited the first speaker to make an introductory statement.

2. Mrs. MESLEM (Director, Division for the Advancement of Women, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs) said that, while consideration of the question of the advancement of women might seem a routine matter, since it was a field in which the United Nations had made steady though slow progress, there had been much talk of women in 1992 and the resurgence of democracy, in which women had had an active role, had been an important event. She warned that, after committing themselves fully to change, women might yet find themselves robbed of their rights and achievements, as had happened so often before. She expressed the hope that massive participation by women in elections would bring about the changes that they advocated and help to create a more open and moral society. In that connection, consideration of the question of the advancement of women was an essential contribution to the international community's efforts to change a world dominated by stereotypes and backward-looking models.

3. The Committee had before it three reports. The report on the status of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (A/47/368) indicated that the number of States that were parties to the Convention had reached 119, as compared with 106 the previous year. However, that represented only a limited step forward since the new States Parties were, in fact, the successors of federations which had broken up. Of the 20 States admitted to the United Nations since the previous report, only four had acceded to the Convention. In terms of percentages, therefore, there had been a step backwards. Since the Convention was a major part of the human rights machinery, the Commission on the Status of Women and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, together with their secretariat, the Division for the Advancement of Women, had tried hard to have the question of women's enjoyment of their fundamental rights placed on the agenda of the World Conference on Human Rights to be held in Vienna. The matter would be taken up again at the Committee's next session in January, and considered by the Commission pursuant to resolution 1992/20 of the Economic and Social Council.

4. She drew attention to general recommendation 19 (1992) on violence against women, in the report of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (A/47/38). The recommendation contained a number of in-depth analyses and proposed detailed and specific measures, thus illustrating the way in which the Committee sought to carry out the responsibilities conferred upon it by the Convention. It also supplemented the work of the Commission on the Status of Women which was currently engaged in preparing an international instrument on the elimination of violence

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against women, the final stage in the efforts undertaken in that field since 1975, during International Women's Year. In September, the Commission had considered a draft declaration prepared by an intersessional working group, on the elimination of violence against women, with a view to submitting it to its 1993 session and having it adopted by the General Assembly.

5. She stressed the importance of the draft declaration, which contained a definition of violence against women in the context of international law and specific proposals for preventing and eradicating such violence. The report on the Convention (A/47/368), which was technical in nature, should be read in the context of the report submitted at the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, which contained information on a number of matters relating to the implementation of the Convention.

6. The report on the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2000 (A/47/377) was divided into two sections. The first concerned the priority themes to be considered by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-seventh session, in March 1993. The theme of equality implied increased awareness by women of their rights. Accordingly, the report examined means of encouraging women to exercise the rights conferred upon them by the human rights instruments already adopted. In regard to development, the priority theme concerned the elimination of extreme poverty, which affected women disproportionately. A study was under way of how poverty was transmitted from generation to generation and of ways of breaking the cycle, including through action by the government. The capacity of the public sector to solve economic and social problems had been strongly disputed in recent years, but there was also concern that market forces, instead of solving the problem of extreme poverty, in fact helped to perpetuate it. The difficulty was to establish a link between the public sector's capacity for regulation and long-term investment and the functioning of the market and between that capacity and the results, which were difficult to quantify, of voluntary efforts by the community. The third priority theme concerned women's place in the peace process. Women were virtually excluded from it, being neither parties to the decisions on war and peace, nor involved in their implementation. It was a field in which stereotypes were very clear cut. However, the desire of women to contribute to peace and their skills in that field would enrich the process considerably, as was already being seen in the active part played by women in such varied circumstances as the Middle East peace talks and the United Nations peace-keeping operations in Angola and South Africa. The report also considered the question of women in the armed forces and the contribution they could make if they enjoyed equality in that field.

7. The second section of the report (A/47/377) included information on the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, in the context of the regular work programme of the Commission on the Status of Women. The report noted that a statement of programme budget implications had been drawn up which, if adopted by the Assembly, would mean that during the coming

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biennium the World Conference would have at its disposal resources from the regular budget comparable to those enjoyed by most other world conferences.

8. The success of the Conference would depend on the quality of national and regional preparations and it was important for Governments and non-governmental organizations to take advantage of the preparatory period in order to consider what they hoped to accomplish. The Commission had begun to outline a Platform for Action which it hoped the Conference would adopt and for which guidelines had been laid down in its resolutions 35/4 and 36/8. Resolution 35/4 placed special emphasis on the need to enhance awareness of women's rights under international conventions and national law, to increase the proportion of women involved in decision-making, to study the reasons why women did not enjoy the same social conditions as men, and to establish institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women. In resolution 36/8, the Commission called for the Platform for Action to take account of the impact of the changes that had occurred in the world on the status of women, the importance of integrating gender perspectives in policy-making, the need to give priority to the situation of rural women, and the differences in priorities among regions. The role of women in decision-making and the role of women entrepreneurs in mobilizing resources and promoting development should also be considered at each regional conference.

9. The Division for the Advancement of Women had been entrusted with the task of drawing up the preliminary draft Platform for Action and had held consultations with the regional commissions, other Secretariat services and the specialized agencies. It would take account of the debates on the question held in the Third Committee during the current session.

10. Ms. CAPELING-ALAKIJA (Director, United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)) said that women had played little, if any, part in the creation of the major international institutions. However, the time had come to draw on the talents of all in order to bring about, through a more innovative approach, the changes needed in a world where interdependence was an inescapable fact of life. The prospects for a better future lay in the hands of women. Women were finally taking their place in public life and demonstrating that there was really no such thing as women's issues, but that all issues were of concern to women.

11. The work of UNIFEM consisted mainly of establishing links between women at local level and the decision-making process which shaped their future at national level. On the one hand, the Fund provided direct support for small-scale but creative women's initiatives, while on the other it encouraged innovative programmes to remove the obstacles hindering full participation by women at all levels.

12. The activities undertaken in the regions offered concrete examples of that dual approach. Many African countries were racked by political conflict or ravaged by drought. At present, one in three of the world's refugees was African and 80 per cent of African refugees or displaced persons were women

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and children. In Liberia, UNIFEM had therefore concentrated on addressing the specific needs of women refugees, notably by training them in skills which would enable them to earn a living not only in their current circumstances, but also on their subsequent return to their country of origin.

13. In Latin America and the Caribbean, women themselves had brought to the Fund's attention vivid examples of how domestic and community violence had blocked their full participation in development. In Venezuela, a project had been introduced to sensitize police officers who dealt with cases of sexual and domestic violence. The pilot scheme had been extended to all members of the police academy. Other activities sought to encourage the exchange of information in the field and to document the extent of the problem. In order to mobilize funds for such initiatives, UNIFEM was holding an international seminar in cooperation with the Dutch Government to provide a forum for dialogue among policy makers, donors and women who had developed effective approaches to reducing violence.

14. In southern Asia, UNIFEM had held a series of national summits on the environment for peasant women in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, allowing them to voice their concerns regarding the impact of environmental problems on their daily lives and to put forward proposals. Subsequently, three of the peasant women had attended the Earth Summit in Rio. They would shortly be reporting on the Summit at follow-up meetings with women's non-governmental organizations, planners, policy makers and researchers, where strategies would be developed to implement the decisions taken in Rio.

15. In that regard, it was worth remembering that in 1989 the initial resolution on the Rio Conference made no reference to women whatsoever. Women throughout the world had rallied to the cause and succeeded in securing participation in the preparations. In addition, an important decision had been adopted aimed at including a global goal in Agenda 21 promoting the effective participation of women in knowledge generation, decision-making, and management at local, national, regional and international levels. UNIFEM had also financed the post of special advisor on women, environment and development in the secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. As a result, women's concerns had been integrated into Agenda 21, which included several recommendations for the education and training of women.

16. In early November, the General Assembly would need to take decisions concerning the establishment of new institutions to monitor the implementation of the agreements made at Rio. It was necessary to ensure that women were equitably represented in those institutions at all levels. Women must have opportunities to sit on the new Commission on Sustainable Development and its high-level advisory board and to occupy senior positions in the Commission's permanent secretariat.

17. As the Fund's programmes were possible only because of the generosity of its donors, she thanked the Governments of developing and industrialized

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countries which continued to make contributions to the Fund despite the prevailing economic crisis, as well as the National Committees for UNIFEM, non-governmental organizations and international women's organizations. She also thanked the private sector for its support.

18. Ms. Julie Andrews, whom the Secretary-General had appointed as the Fund's Goodwill Ambassador in March 1992, had already visited Jordan and Senegal in that capacity. In November, Ms. Andrews would be in Japan to promote the Fund's work and to launch the Japanese National Committee for UNIFEM.

19. Lastly, she wished to thank the women's networks around the world which had been the source of many of the Fund's activities. The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace, to be held in 1995, would be an opportunity for the international women's movement to show that it was equal to the particular challenge of confronting an interdependent world.

20. Ms. HABACHY (Focal Point for Women in the Office of the Director of Personnel in the Secretariat), referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the status of women in the Secretariat (A/47/508), said that, as at 30 June 1992, women occupied 30.6 per cent of the posts subject to geographical distribution, as compared with 29.2 per cent in June 1991, which represented an increase of 1.4 per cent. There were no women at the Under-Secretary-General level, only one at the Assistant Secretary-General level and, out of a total of 80 staff members at the D-2 level, women still numbered only 10. However, there were 26 women at the D-1 level, as compared with only 20 one year earlier. With women occupying slightly more than 10 per cent of posts at the D-level and above, the Organization was still a long way from the target of 25 per cent by 1995 which had been set by the General Assembly. Nevertheless, 87 women had been promoted at the the P-2 to D-1 levels during the period from July 1991 to June 1992, as compared with 46 during the previous 12-month period. For men, the figures were 98 and 96, respectively. Women's share of all promotions (47 per cent) exceeded the share of posts subject to geographical distribution which were held by women (30.6 per cent). With regard to recruitment, 50 women, or 39.1 per cent of the total, had been recruited during the period from July 1991 to June 1992.

21. Moreover, with regard to the secretarial occupation, a restructuring review of jobs had been carried out which had resulted in an increase in the numbers of higher level posts (by about 60), particularly at the G-5 level. Lastly, circulars concerning procedures to deal fairly and firmly with cases of alleged sexual harassment in the Secretariat would be issued shortly. The achievement of the goals set, which had been made more difficult by restructuring and the temporary ban on recruitment, would require intensified efforts.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.